

CHAPTER XV.

REFORMATION AND REVOLUTION IN SCOTLAND— JOHN KNOX AND THE LORDS OF THE CONGREGATION.

In 1555 the year of Lyndsay's death, the country had been thoroughly prepared for the upheaval that was to come within five years with such startling swiftness. And the man who was to play the chief rôle in that convulsion was ready for his task. For the next twenty-five years John Knox was the greatest figure on the stage of Scottish history. He was even in some respects one of the master spirits of his age. He was born for his mission as the aggressive leader of a movement which others had prepared. He appeared on the scene at the supreme moment when the forces of progress, which for years had been gathering strength for the final struggle, met their enemy in death grips. His early career may be read in that most dramatic of narratives with which he has enriched the literature of his country—the "History of the Reformation in Scotland." It is only necessary here to review briefly the facts of his early life which made him, in character and action, the man he was.

Knox, who according to tradition was born at Haddington in 1505, was a pupil of John Major at Glasgow University, and was evidently versed in scholastic philosophy and theology. For twenty years thereafter he appears to have filled the offices of priest, tutor, and apostolical notary of the diocese of St Andrews. He first emerges into history as the associate and disciple of George Wishart, and after his martyrdom, as preacher of the faith, which Wishart sealed with his death, to the fierce men who had avenged it and held the castle of St Andrews in defiance of the regent. In these striking surroundings he began his struggle with Antichrist, as he called the pope, and during the truce in the spring of 1547 he startled the good folks of St Andrews by a heretic sermon, delivered